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ABSTRACT

A 2-year evaluation of the Honolulu (Hawaii) District Instructional Assistance and Assessment Component involved placement of part-time teachers in selected specific learning disabilities classrooms to work with special education teachers. Twelve elementary school classes were involved during the first year (six project and six comparison classes); it expanded to 21 elementary and secondary classes during the second year (10 project and 11 comparison classes). A needs assessment of the Special Education Program was conducted along with the evaluation. For both, questionnaires were distributed, classroom observations were conducted, and parents and students were interviewed. Achievement tests were administered for the evaluation component. The findings of both the needs assessment and evaluation are summarized and the following recommendations are made: (1) provide opportunities to discuss and resolve conflicts of opinion among school personnel regarding mainstreaming; (2) provide inservicing on mainstreaming and teaching strategies to administrators and special and regular education teachers; (3) reevaluate the appropriateness of instructional (particularly seatwork) materials for each child; (4) reassess the demands of individualizing instruction to the extent it requires extensive recordkeeping of skills mastered, continuous selection and assignment of learning tasks, and meticulous monitoring of students' progress at the expense of pupil-teacher interaction. (VW)

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Hawai'i State Department of Education
Honolulu District
Needs Assessment of the Special
Education Program, 1986

and

Evaluation of the Instructional Assistance
and Assessment Component Project,
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Summary Report

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EC 200 784

The Honolulu District Office of the Hawaii Department of Education contracted the Curriculum Research and Development Group (CRDG) of the University of Hawai'i to conduct a two year evaluation of the Instructional Assistance and Assessment Component (IAC), a special project of selected specific learning disabilities classrooms. In conjunction with the evaluation a needs assessment of the Special Education Program was conducted.

The IAC project involved twelve elementary school classes in year-one (six project classes and six comparison classes) and was expanded to twenty-one classes in year-two (ten project classes and eleven comparison classes). A part-time teacher was assigned to each of the project schools to work with the special education teacher.

The needs assessment encompassed a survey of the special education program at the district level. All handicapping conditions were included.

A similar design was followed for both the evaluation and needs assessment. Questionnaires were distributed, classroom observations were conducted, and parents and students were interviewed. The Metropolitan Achievement Tests were administered for the evaluation component.

Needs Assessment

A major finding of the needs assessment was the discrepancy in responses among administrators, special education teachers, and regular education teachers on issues such as mainstreaming and placement of handicapped students. Difficulty in implementing the mainstreaming concept may be related to the differences in attitudes among key personnel in the special education program. Regular education teachers who were the instructors of specific learning disabled students did not feel they could provide appropriate instruction to children with special needs, whereas principals felt they could. Similarly regular education teachers were likely to support separate rather than integrated classes for the child with special needs. In comparison principals showed higher support for integrated rather than separate classes. Proportionately, special education teachers' support of separate classes fell half way between the other two groups.

These differences in opinion suggest underlying discontent and conflict among school personnel regarding instruction of the child with special needs. Of particular concern is the learning disabled child who, in comparison to children with other disabilities, would most likely be involved in both special and regular classes throughout the day. Parents who were interviewed for the IAC evaluation expressed concern about their children moving from one class to another during the day, missing instruction in the regular

classroom while they were in the resource room, and generally receiving more attention in the resource room than in the regular classroom where they would encounter difficulties "keeping up."

There was strong agreement among administrators and both teacher groups that integration required a joint effort between instructors. However, while in agreement with the philosophy of mainstreaming, the groups disagreed on the practical aspects of implementing the process. Responses to questions indicated a clear line between instructional responsibilities of special education and regular education teachers. Special education teachers reported greater emphasis on developing their students' basic academic skills. Regular education teachers placed more emphasis on providing the proper environment for learning. Utilization of strategies which illustrated a joint effort between special and regular education was limited. Low proportions of teachers were coordinating the use of the same materials between classes. Assisting the child with assignments from regular classes was infrequent among special education teachers. Furthermore, while special education teachers ranked regular education teachers' recommendations as a criterion of moderately high importance in deciding when a child should be rescinded, use of those recommendations was ranked low.

There were several concerns about the identification and evaluation of children with special needs. School level screening procedures were considered less adequate by special education teachers in comparison to administrators. Teachers commented that their input in the process was lacking or that students' behavioral problems colored the academic assessment. Teachers also questioned whether their school had a screening process suggesting that maybe referrals were made across the board without first exhausting school resources. One principal reported that not all children can be adequately identified because the school staff either "lacked experience or information." Another principal commented that school level screening was "cumbersome." Both teachers and principals agreed that the identification process was lengthy and that the problem was at the district rather than school level.

A common concern of teachers and principals was that reports of the diagnostic team were not written in lay language. Use of test scores was not considered adequate; observations and conferences with teachers were desirable. Reports which were too general or filled with clinical terminology were not usable in preparing IEP plans.

While the evaluators expected that special education teachers would be very involved in the evaluation of the child with special needs, only half of the teachers agreed they were adequately involved. In contrast three-fourths of the principals believed their teachers were adequately involved.

Criticisms voiced by teachers were that little effort was extended to consult with them and if they made recommendations, these may not have been followed by the District Office.

The District Office has strong feelings about the importance of the administrator's role in the special education program in order to assure that the program runs smoothly in the school. Administrators seemed less likely to support these areas as being very important. Results indicated that familiarity with laws was very important to principals; school budget matters, school-community coordination, and mainstreaming were seen as less important. In addition principals were likely to feel that responsibility for these areas was presently shared equally with teachers rather than areas for which they had greater responsibility. Unfortunately administrators were not asked about their own needs for inservicing. It appears, however, that a need exists. Another clue suggesting an area for principal inservicing is based on the survey which showed that principals felt they acknowledged teachers for being innovative, whereas teachers did not feel this was so.

Evaluation

Classroom observations indicated that teachers were most often observed assisting children with questions and monitoring their progress. In both the year-one and year-two evaluations one-to-one instruction as well as high degree of contact with the teacher occurred more frequently in project schools than in comparison schools. Similarly, the engagement rate of students in project schools was slightly higher than comparison schools. These data suggest the value of the part-time teacher in providing direct instruction and keeping students on task.

Group interaction between teacher and students or among students themselves was infrequently observed. Seatwork was a common activity and may possibly be a consequence of the individualized education program. Children were often assigned work individually, and the richness of shared experiences and group interactions was limited. When discussions or other teacher-directed group work did occur, students freely participated in these activities and data indicated that there was a slightly higher task engagement during these periods than with seatwork assignments.

Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT) were administered to both project and comparison school students. Year-one evaluation included only elementary level students; in year-two the project expanded to secondary level students as well. Scaled scores were selected for evaluation based on the MAT Teacher's Manual (1978) recommendations to use scaled scores for comparing performance among battery levels (that is, students are administered different levels of the test, and scores need to be equated) and for measuring change in achievement over a period of time.

In the year-one evaluation students in comparison schools scored higher on both the pretest and posttest in all batteries (Reading, Mathematics, Language, and Basic Total) than students in project schools. Although their scaled scores remained below those of comparison schools, project school students showed greater gain between pretest and posttest scores. That is, the mean difference between test scores was greater for project school students than for comparison school students.

In the year-two evaluation the test score results showed an opposite pattern than that observed in year one. Project school students scored higher in both the pretest and posttest in all batteries than did comparison school students. Project school students also had year-two pretest scores which were above their year-one posttest scores. In contrast to the previous year points gained between scores were similar for both school groups. Finally, in comparison to year one both project and comparison school students had higher scaled scores in the second year of the evaluation.

Both observation and test data suggest a positive influence of the part-time teacher in the specific learning disability program. Several recommendations are given to strengthen the program.

1. Provide opportunities to discuss and resolve conflicts of opinion among school personnel regarding mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is viewed as an important component of the project but teachers and administrators hold very different views on the issue. Before progress can be made everyone needs to be in agreement about the goals and program implementation.
2. Provide inservicing on mainstreaming and teaching strategies found to be effective with special needs students. School administrators, and special and regular education teachers should participate in this in-servicing.
3. Reevaluate the appropriateness of instructional material (particular seatwork) materials for each child. When seatwork materials are used, make sure students are prepared (assignment introduced and directions understood) to work on their assignment.
4. Reassess the demands of individualizing instruction to the extent it requires extensive record keeping of skills mastered, continuous selection and assignment of learning tasks, and meticulous monitoring of students progress at the expense of pupil-teacher interaction. Of course teacher must remain responsive to the individual students' needs. The method of attaining this goal should include a balance of instructional practices.